

“Leafscapes” an Artist’s View

Standards Addressed

Visual Arts Standard:

C. Visual Design and Production: C.4.5.

Environmental Education Standard:

B. Knowledge of Environmental Processes and Systems:
B.4.1.

Key Concepts/ Content

- 🌲 To know there are thousands of species of trees that share many characteristics and needs.
- 🌲 To appreciate artists and works of landscape art.
- 🌲 To appreciate the esthetic values of forests.

Teacher Background

An artist uses the space in a landscape as sky and land space. A horizon line is where the two meet. Depending upon where the viewer’s eye visualizes the horizon, the space can be varied into more or less sky or land space by placing the horizon line higher or lower across the picture.

Depth is a principle of art and is created in a work of art in many different ways. Simple perspective techniques to create a sense of depth are:

- Size—Make an object larger for it to appear to be closer to us in space and smaller for it to appear to be farther away.
- Overlap—Overlap objects to create a sense of depth by not seeing the entire object that is farthest away.
- Placement—To make an object look farther away, place it closer to the horizon line. To make an object look closer, place it farther from the horizon line.

This activity focuses on trees as part of the landscape. When observing trees ask the students to note the similarities and differences between various types of trees. All trees have roots, a trunk, branches, and leaves or needles. Roots anchor the tree in the ground and absorb water and nutrients

from the soil. The trunk provides support to make the tree stand tall but is flexible enough to bend in the wind. The leaves or needles make food for the tree. Leaves use carbon dioxide from the air, water from the roots, and the sun's energy (in the form of sunlight) to make sugar (glucose). This food-making chemical reaction, called photosynthesis, can take place only in the presence of chlorophyll - the green pigment that is found in all green plants. Chlorophyll absorbs the sunlight needed for photosynthesis. During photosynthesis, leaves release oxygen, which becomes part of the air that animals and other living things need.

The gift of expression through art, photography, and writing can transport us to places we can only imagine. Through the conservation movement and the writing and painting of such notable artists as Thomas Moran, Frederick Law Olmstead, William Henry Jackson and many more came the impetus for the creation of forest reserves and national parks.

The Library of Congress is an excellent information source on the conservation movement in the United States. The following is an excerpt from the American Memory historical collection titled "The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920.

Beginning around the middle of the eighteenth century, European and American literary figures had drawn increasing attention to the importance of nature; by now, in the mid-nineteenth century, travel literature in periodicals and books joins with this Romantic literary legacy to stimulate a broad popular movement of "nature appreciation."

Throughout the remaining decades of the century, the "nature essay" burgeons as an American literary genre.

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, popular interest in ornithology proliferates through books, articles, and local clubs, providing a grass-roots base for support of many aspects of conservation.

Prints, lithographs and engravings of American scenery, especially in the West, receive wide popular distribution between this decade and the turn of the century, stimulating broad interest in and appreciation for the special qualities of the American landscape, including its wilderness.

As you tour the Library of Congress historical collections perhaps you would like to find out more about the creative Americans who enthralled a nation with the words and pictures of the American West. Would there have been a Conservation Movement without these great communicators?

Please take a look at the Library of Congress for maps, photographs, and drawings about Wisconsin. The website is:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/collections/finder.html>

Then select: List All Collections.

Of particular interest are:

- The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920
- Touring Turn of the Century America: Photographs from the Detroit Publishing Company, 1880-1920
- American Environmental Photographs, 1891-1936: Images from the University of Chicago Library
- Panoramic Maps (search for Wisconsin – your town may be listed)

Getting Ready

- Collect leaves and press them. You want a variety of leaf margins (edges of leaf), e.g., oak, maple, willow, spruce, aspen, plus both small and large leaves.
- Collect landscape art prints from famous artists and describe their lives.

Safety Issues



Follow any district guidelines for a field trip.

Materials Needed

- ✿ A variety of pressed leaves
- ✿ 12 x 18 white drawing paper, enough for the entire class
- ✿ Crayons, watercolor paints, brushes, cups for water
- ✿ Photocopies of the journal entry pages (2 per student)

Procedures

1. Introduce students to art prints of landscapes. Lead a classroom discussion about the artists chosen for this activity including a discussion about the aesthetics of the landscape; also lead a discussion about the technical aspects of the landscape, emphasizing the horizon line, sky space, land space, and a sense of depth.
2. Introduce students to simple perspective techniques that an artist uses to create a three-dimensional landscape on a two-dimensional surface.
3. Take students to a school site or park area where trees grow. Have each group of students collect leaves of various sizes, shapes, and color. Ask the students to discuss the similarities and differences among the leaves. Then lead a discussion about the purpose of the leaf and how each leaf might carry out that purpose. Relate that discussion to the discussion about similarities and differences. Create a landscape picture by having the students lay out the leaves creatively. (You might want to tie the discussion about similarities and differences, with that about the purpose for leaves.) Remove leaves to complete the color of the sky and land space with watercolors. When dry, glue leaves onto paper.
4. Conclude with a discussion about the group work. Then relate their leaf scapes to those of the artists chosen for this activity. Option: Instead of a leaf gathering trip, use leaves you have collected, pressed, and saved in the fall and do this activity in the winter.
5. Have students very lightly sketch a horizon line to create the general areas of sky and land space on a journal page.

6. Discuss a variety of tree species, their form, branch shapes and angles, size of leaves, and margins (edges) of different leaves.
7. To create a landscape, have the students look at the leaf margins. Use the margin to trace shapes that will become a landscape/leafscape. For example: an oak edge = low mountains, willows = rolling hills (erase the horizon line once it is established with these hills), maple points = high mountains, and aspen could be small trees (see diagram). Encourage the students to be creative with the margin shapes and their constructed leafscape.
8. Have the students color in their landscape. Glue the leaves they used on the other journal page. Label the leaf types and where it was used in the leafscape, using the terms used earlier in the Tree Identification activity.
9. Conclude with discussion of student work and display.

**Evidence of
Student
Understanding**

This activity is an activity primarily designed to gain an appreciation of art through leaf scapes, so an assessment might not be valuable.

**References/
Resources**

<http://www.pappi.org/paperu/artClass/artClass.htm>

Activity ASheet

Leafscapes

LEAVES TO GATHER, DRY, AND PRESS:

Willow - Get small leaves; they make great tall tree shapes; longer leaf margins (edges) are good for tracing gentle hills

Cedar - use small pieces; make good conifer tree shapes

Northern red oak - sharp points will make good high peaks on mountains

White oak - margins help the students draw lower rounded mountains

Maples - tips can look like the top of trees

Quaking aspen - get small leaves; they make great triangle-shaped trees. Use this exercise to teach the children to observe the different shapes trees have.

Conifer - use the needles on a small branch. Place at the bottom of the drawing. Have the student turn the pencil on the side and rub it over the needles. This will give them a texture that looks like grass. Teach students how to shade this off lighter and lighter as it nears the hills so it will blend into the landscape.



